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ABSTRACT

The effects of five secondary school individualized in-service training programs on classroom reading skills instruction are compared. The initial and final perceptions of the teachers, concerning their responsibilities for providing for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities, are measured by use of attitude inventories, self-rating scales, and/or summaries of their needs related to reading skills instruction. Verbal data are acquired during in-service training sessions, individual conferences, and classroom visits. Training content includes assessment procedures, teaching techniques, classroom management, grouping, and lesson planning. Four factors are considered strong influences on the in-service programs: training processes, training content, institutional influences, and consultants' influences. Three conclusions are reached: (1) teachers tend to give attention to existing reading programs in their schools as one means of providing for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities; (2) teachers tend to change their instructional procedures when receiving help with the problems of immediate concern to them; and (3) teachers tend to require instruction in classroom management and lesson planning before learning techniques for teaching reading skills. (AW)

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STRENGTHENING READING AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

(Session: Secondary Reading #1, May 12, 1972, 10:30 a.m.)

This report compares the effects on classroom reading-skills instruction of five secondary-school individualized in-service training programs in which the writer served as consultant. The goal of each program was the improvement of subject-matter teachers' abilities to provide for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities.

Each training program incorporated problem-solving with individual consultant-participant conferences. The major difference among the five programs was the composition of each of the five involved groups.

RE004 144

The In-Service Training Model

The design selected for the investigations was based on suggestions for improving in-service education (1 and 5) and for helping secondary teachers provide for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities (4, 8, and 12). The in-service training program was viewed as the independent variable which would influence subject-matter teachers' sensitivities, understandings, abilities, and attitudes (the dependent variables).

To measure change in teachers' behaviors, it was necessary to measure their initial and final perceptions concerning their responsibilities for providing for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities. This was accomplished by attitude inventories, self-rating scales, and/or summaries of their needs related to reading-skills instruction.

Verbal data was acquired during in-service training sessions, individual conferences, and classroom visits. Analysis of the verbal data led to inferences which influenced the content of the in-service sessions.

Four factors were considered to be strong influences on the in-service program: training processes, training content, institutional influences, and consultant's influences. To the degree possible, the processes remained constant; these were problem-identification and -solution by individuals, small-group discussion of the variables in the problems, individual assistance by the consultant, and total-group study of content related to shared problems. The training content included assessment procedures, techniques for teaching skills, classroom management, grouping, and lesson planning. Institutional influences varied, being stronger in some instances and

weaker in others. The consultant's influences varied in terms of the expressed problems; however, this variation appeared to be related to the selection of content rather than processes.

It should be clear that the in-service program required considerable training in the techniques of identifying and solving problems. Assuming that teachers would change their perceptions if they received help on instructional problems identified by them, the consultant guided participants initially in stating dissatisfactions and the hopes they held if they could bring about some changes. In small groups, teachers discussed the variables in the situations identified as dissatisfactions; as they helped each other, they recognized many similarities. They planned the types of assessment needed to determine the true nature of each situation; cause-effect relationships were tentatively stated, and possible hypotheses were examined before a definite plan of action was started. As content was provided in training sessions, teachers began to try selected techniques. As was expected, newly discovered dissatisfactions emerged in relation to, or as a result of, the field experiments, necessitating additions to the content of the training sessions. This approach to problem-solving, proposed by Corey (2), was found to be practical. Recent publications suggest similar procedures (10 and 11).

One should not infer that the consultant did not prepare materials and activities designed to help teachers provide reading-skills instruction. These were available, prepared in advance of the program's initial session. However, no content was introduced unless there was clear evidence that the content was needed. At times, the content was conveyed to one individual; at other times, the content was presented

to small groups or to the total group. Since the membership of small groups changed according to interests and/or problems, there was continued sharing of content by the participants as they discovered the value of particular techniques or materials. In some instances, teachers introduced content that they believed would be helpful for specific situations.

The consultant's main technique in individual conferences was questioning, the purpose being to help teachers focus on as many aspects of a problem as were practical. If it appeared that a teacher really could not decide upon a course of action, the consultant suggested several alternatives, calling attention to the questions that needed to be answered in connection with each. When possible, the teacher was referred to someone in the in-service program working on a similar problem.

Descriptions of the Five Programs

Group 1. The participants were twenty-four English teachers and one reading teacher from a large inner-city high school encouraged by the school's administration. The diversity of problems required the assistance of three graduate students in reading. As a result, the teachers administered a variety of reading tests, tried out various instructional techniques, and implemented lessons requiring suitable materials and intra-class grouping to provide for pupils' reading abilities. Observations and conferences revealed changes in teaching procedures, especially in making assignments, and a general attitude of accepting more responsibility for planning lessons suitable for pupils' reading levels. A major outcome of the program was an administrative decision, based on the participants' recommendations,

to utilize the reading teacher as a diagnostician and consultant to the English teachers, rather than as a developmental reading teacher working with large groups of children for six weeks. Plans designed to extend the training of teachers in teaching reading skills suggested that the English teachers were committed to continued professional growth in the area of providing for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities.

Group 2. The participants were sixteen subject-matter teachers in a large suburban junior high school in a metropolitan area. They had expressed an interest in helping pupils improve in reading skills. The writer was assigned to the school for one semester as a special consultant. Early in the training program, it was clear that the teachers were focusing more and more attention on the school's existing reading program. Since the reading teacher did not want to work with the in-service program, it was necessary for the consultant to collect information about the program and to explain it to those interested. That explanation, in turn, caused the teachers to criticize the program and to recommend changes in the content of the developmental reading program and in the utilization of reading instruction materials. Apparently, in studying ways to improve their own classroom instruction, several teachers had recognized that very few word-attack skills were included in the developmental reading program then carried on. Observations and conferences during the program revealed changes in teaching procedures and attitudes, particularly in planning lessons suitable for various levels of pupils. Tests of teachers' knowledge of word-attack skills and questioning abilities revealed few significant gains as a result of the training. The culminating activity was a statement of recommendations for improving the developmental reading

program, a report well-received by the administration. An ensuing investigation by the reading teacher of the differences in the four feeder elementary schools' reading programs led to a change in testing procedures for the following school year. (For a full description, see 7.)

Group 3. The participants were twenty-one English teachers from nine middle schools (grades 6-8), serving communities ranging from inner-city low-economic level to suburban middle-class level. The initial problem selected was that of reading-skills instruction techniques, the consensus being that they had already learned all they needed to know about assessment and diagnosis. It became evident, during discussion of types of lesson plans, that these teachers really wanted to know how reading is taught in the elementary school. A simulated demonstration of a teacher's guiding a reading group appeared to convince the teachers that there was great similarity between their lesson plans and the plan for a guided reading lesson. A major outcome of the small-group discussions was the request for more assistance in diagnosing pupils' needs as part of the daily classroom activities. It was suggested that teachers keep a list of errors made by pupils in oral reading, answering questions, writing compositions, and spelling tests. At a later session, these were studied for clues that would indicate pupils' needs. By working together, the teachers could determine that many pupils consistently used configuration clues, overlooked context clues, used homonyms in writing, revealed inadequacies in certain sound-letter correlations, and substituted meaningful spellings for parts of words. At the conclusion of the program, the teachers indicated major gains of improved attitudes about pupils' errors and increased skills in planning lessons to provide

for a range of reading abilities, including the skills instruction needed to help pupils overcome their weaknesses.

Group 4. The participants were thirty-two experienced professional personnel from fourteen secondary schools (grades 6-12), including reading teachers, media specialists, guidance counselors, curriculum coordinators, and the county secondary reading specialist. To meet the expressed needs of the group for a common source, Herber's text (6) was supplied; many problems identified by individuals were solved in part by Herber's suggestions for study and reasoning guides. The consultant was invited to visit each represented school to discuss specific problems with teachers and administrators. Subsequently, the participants shared ideas under consideration in their schools for additional in-service components, for use of reading teachers as consultants to classroom teachers, and for improvement of the school's reading center. At an interim evaluation of the training program's effects, it was clear that many skills had been developed for sharing assessment and instructional techniques. The secondary reading specialist asked the group if they thought they could serve as key personnel in the development of an in-service program for preschool session of the coming academic year. The outcome of the discussion was a proposal to the county administration for a whole day for secondary schools' reading instruction. The result, due to the emphasis on Right to Read, was that both elementary and secondary teachers in the entire county spent a whole day the next fall under the leadership of school-based reading teachers and other teachers trained specifically for that day's events.

Group 5. The participants were twenty-one administrators and/or representatives of administrators from fourteen secondary schools

(grades 6-12). The initial consideration was accountability, with reference to priority reading behavioral objectives and the means of assessing pupil progress. Much attention was directed to lesson planning and to selection of objectives suitable for specific types of lessons. The participants concluded that at least 75 per cent of the objectives could be included in their ongoing lessons without difficulty. The major need was for assistance in diagnostic teaching procedures (similar to that expressed by group 3). Pupils' spelling tests and written compositions were analyzed for types of errors; it appeared that meaningful substitutions accounted for most of the errors made by average and high achievers. An outgrowth of that study was a serious attempt to differentiate between slow learners and low achievers; it was agreed that these may be quite dissimilar in many ways. Reports of reading programs in the represented schools provided new ideas for several administrators. Subsequently, the variables in reading programs were considered, and criteria for providing for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities were outlined. As with groups 3 and 4, changes in classroom instruction occurred in intra-class grouping, lesson planning, improved questioning, and follow-up planning based on diagnosis of pupils' needs. Four sources were utilized extensively (3, 6, 9, 13).

Inferences and Conclusions

Many inferences may come from an examination of the results of the five programs, the most conspicuous being these: (1) The problem-solving model utilized in these programs appears to help school personnel improve their skills in providing for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities. (2) The interaction of participants

from a variety of types of schools seems to stimulate teachers to try more procedures. (3) The involvement of status personnel (specialists and administrators) appears to enhance the possibility of improved instructional behavior.

Three conclusions appear to be justified: (1) Teachers tend to give attention to existing reading programs in their schools as one means of providing for pupils' individual differences in reading abilities. (2) Teachers tend to change their instructional procedures if they receive help on the problems of immediate concern to them. (3) Teachers tend to require instruction in classroom management and lesson planning before learning reading-skills instructional techniques.

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